Officership: The Professional Practice

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GIVEN THE INCREASED operations tempo of the past decade, many in the Army family have lost comrades-in-arms, friends, or loved ones. How are we to remember these people's lives, services, and sacrifices? Did these young people, who had lived so little, died so young, and left so much behind, die in vain? How are members of the Army profession and the larger Army family to make meaning of such tragedies and to go on with their lives?

Army officers must have a clear understanding of who they are that goes far deeper than the work they do on a daily basis. Yet, a dominate self-concept as individuals is not held in common and often does not approximate the true meaning of being a commissioned Army officer, with all that a shared professional identity entails.[1]

Army Officers are shorting themselves of an immense potential of inspiration and satisfaction because of their poorly conceived self-concept, which contributes directly to the dissatisfaction among junior officers and to the shortage of captains and the misutilization of lieutenants. Even if there were no other costs to the Army's effectiveness, having a poorly conceived self-concept is too high a price for the profession to bear.

In fairness, the lack of a commonly held self-identity is not the fault of younger officers. Since the end of the Persian Gulf war, the Army has focused little on junior officers' professional education and development. The Army's decade-long builddown, increasing operational deployments, and doing more with less has diverted attention elsewhere. The 11 September 2001 attack on America has exacerbated this condition. Not surprisingly, during the past decade, study after study, including the Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) Officer Study, has documented the erosion of morale and esteem among junior officers and the widening gap of distrust between them and their officer leaders.[2]

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How to Think About Professions

More so than occupations or organizations, professions focus on developing expert knowledge in individual members so they can apply specific expertise in a professional practice. Doctors perfect medical treatments; lawyers apply legal expertise to new cases; and the military develops new technologies and tactics to provide for the common defense. In most cases, professional expertise and practice is essential to the functioning of society and is beyond the average citizen's capabilities. Often, becoming a professional takes years of study and preparation.

Professional success is measured primarily by effectiveness—how well the practitioner succeeds—rather than by efficiency. Was the patient cured? Was justice served? Was the battle won and the homeland defended? Because of their expert knowledge and the moral obligations inherent in professional practices, professions focus heavily on developing individual members' expertise. A significant part of professional development is learning the ethics of the profession and individual and collective standards of practice. These are the attributes that create and help maintain the necessary trust between the profession and its clients. Western societies gen-

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erally grant professions a large degree of autonomy to set standards, to police their ranks, and to develop their future members.

Some professions have a less visible, darker side. They compete fiercely for control over arenas or jurisdictions in which they seek to apply their expertise.[3] A well-publicized example of such a competition is currently being waged between physicians and HMOs as they battle over the right to make patient-care decisions. Other professions face similar challenges as they seek to gain legitimacy in new fields while retaining decision rights in traditional jurisdictions.

The Army is embroiled in many such competitions today across a variety of jurisdictions, including the non-war jurisdiction (counterdrug operations, peacekeeping operations, and so on) in which the Army has often resisted, unsuccessfully, to compete; the jurisdiction of unconventional war, in which the Army is currently competing quite well; and the Army's traditional jurisdiction of conventional land warfare where its ability to compete has been compromised by a force structure considered to be too strategically immobile. The Army's competitors within these jurisdictions include the other two U.S. military professions (aerospace and maritime); foreign militaries; private companies and contractors (many started and led by former Army officers); and international organizations.[4] These rivalries are not trivial, and competitive failure might well result in the Army's demise or integration into one of the other services, much as would happen with a noncompetitive business.

The three U.S. military professions are also government bureaucracies. Unlike professions, bureaucracies focus on routine applications of nonexpert knowledge, usually through standing operating procedures or policies and regulations, more than through the professional expertise of their employees, in whom often little is invested. Therefore, the Army is, on one hand, a vocational profession focused on developing expert knowledge of land warfare and its application by human experts, and on the other hand, it is a hierarchical bureaucracy focused on applying routine knowledge through operating routines, procedures, and checklists. The Army's current, highly centralized approach to unit training "by template," which leaves little to the discretion of junior commanders, is an example of the latter.

This dual nature is unavoidable, though when the bureaucratic dominates the professional, as is arguably the case now, there is cause for immense tensions for individual professionals and for the institution as a whole.[5] Militaries that do not resolve this tension in favor of their professional side can "die" in the professional sense. As their bureaucratic nature dominates, they increasingly squeeze professional practices into bureaucratic molds, tend increasingly to treat professionals as bureaucrats or mere employees, and soon become little more than obedient military bureaucracies exhibiting little of the effectiveness of a vocational profession. One need only look at western European militaries in the post-Cold War era to see such phenomena.

Given this unresolved tension in the Army today, it is paramount that officers—junior or senior—develop professional self-concepts drawn from a right understanding of their roles within the Army profession. Not only will this provide rich personal satisfaction, it will also help reduce unhealthy tensions within the officer corps.

Expert Knowledge and Professional Practice

If the Army is to remain a successful, competitive profession, it must have a clear concept of the expert knowledge it alone can provide. What expertise does it provide that the American people need and want and that can be applied to future situations?

Like other professionals, an infantry company commander has acquired an immense catalogue of expert knowledge–tactics; weapons capabilities; use of available fires; logistics; leadership and care of soldiers; how to work with other professionals (noncommissioned officers [NCOs]); the laws of land warfare; and so on. Once he receives an operational mission, his "practice" is similar to that of other professionals. He analyzes the situation (diagnosis), applies his expert knowledge to it (inference), then develops a plan and leads its execution (treatment).[6] The essence of his professional practice is no different even if the task is to train his unit to standard on certain operational tasks.

Stryker infantry carrier vehicles are offloaded from a C-17 Globemaster III during a demonstration for senior Department of Defense and Congressional leaders, Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, 16 October 2002.

US Army

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Army professionals' basic tasks are four-fold: prepare to kill, kill, prepare to die and, if necessary, die.[7] A society needs soldiers to be well-schooled, effective in the arts of warfighting as a democratic Army and to use their expertise when and where directed. This fact alone points to why the Army needs dedicated commissioned officers. Under commission from the American people and the U.S. Government, and acting as their moral agent, officers provide overall direction to and leadership of the military institution by exercising legal command responsibilities over Army units at all echelons.

Samuel P. Huntington referred to this expertise generally as the "management of violence."[8] Others use similar phrases. Recently, theorists of the social organization of expert work, as well as some military professionals, have made the same point. That is, commissioned officers, particularly senior leaders, direct and lead the Army profession by performing the following critical tasks:

- Bounding, prioritizing, and adapting expert knowledge of the profession for current and future needs of the client.
- Developing such knowledge into the human expertise of Army professionals for application to new situations (professional practice).
- Managing the profession's jurisdictional competitions to ensure the execution of assigned tasks, to remain legitimate, and to survive, serving the client as needed.[9]

Expert knowledge of the profession is the foundation of the officer's expertise and professional practice, and it enables the daily exercise of discretionary judgment to make decisions and to take actions that fulfill moral and legal responsibilities. An Army professional's broad field of expert knowledge contributes to forming the officer's unique self-concept.

The analytical framework in figure 1 allows visualization of several things vital to understanding the Army profession. Across the top are the four broad clusters of expert knowledge. These clusters are groupings of abstract knowledge that form the source of the officer's expertise.

The first cluster is military-technical knowledge of warfighting in land combat (leadership; combat and support doctrines; tactics, techniques, and

procedures; and so on). The second cluster, knowledge of military ethics, enables Army commanders, units, and individual soldiers to fight America's wars according to the legal and moral content of the profession's ethic. The third cluster is knowledge of human development (education, training, moral and character development, and so on) that enables the Army, like other true professions, to develop individual practitioners capable of applying the expertise of the profession when and where directed. Primarily the Army's strategic leaders use the last cluster, political-social knowledge, as they fulfill their responsibilities to resource the profession; to represent it in the councils of the Government and to the client (the American people); and to manage successfully its jurisdictional competitions.

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In actuality, boundaries between areas of abstract knowledge are not as precise as the solid vertical lines in figure 1 suggest. For example, is the issue of force protection and how best to provide it an aspect of military-technical knowledge or of the profession's moral-ethical expertise? Or, does force protection rely more on the Army's expertise in political and social arenas (a matter of adapting successfully to political guidance to avoid casualties)?[10]

Obviously, addressing such issues involves expertise drawn from multiple areas of knowledge where boundaries are not clearly delineated. The point is clear, however. All officers must be experts to some degree (depending on rank and position) in every area of knowledge. Such is the necessary foundation for personal expertise and for continuing to develop as Army professionals.

As the framework in figure 1 indicates, each cluster of the profession's expertise encompasses multiple perspectives. The three perspectives come from the profession's client (American society); from the professional institution itself (the Army, collectively); and, from individual professionals (officers, NCOs, soldiers, or Army civilians). The horizontal boundaries between the groups and their perspectives denote interfaces of potential disagreement and tension between the Army and the society it serves (civil-military relations) and the profession and its individual members (Army-soldier relations).

The four clusters of expert knowledge, which ultimately become areas of expertise for all Army professionals, are what depict Army officers' shared identity. In figure 2, each area of expert knowledge corresponds logically to one identity. Thus, the four identities of the Army officer are warfighter, leader of character, member of the profession, and servant of the Nation.

Clearly, not all officers blend these identities into their dominant self-concept in the same manner or proportion. Infantry company commanders likely view themselves far more as warfighters than as members of a profession or as servants of the Nation. The opposite might be true of a major or lieutenant colonel assigned to the Army general staff at the Pentagon, who would more likely see themselves as resourcers of Army needs fighting jurisdictional battles with other military professions and private contractors.

The point is that all Army officers, regardless of branch or grade, should hold in some proportion all four identities. They must share a common profes-

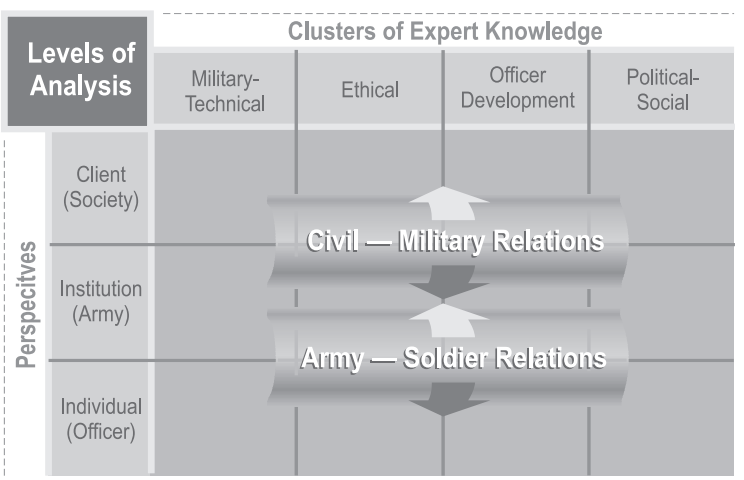

Figure 1. Analytical framework for understanding the hierarchy of the Army profession's expert knowledge.

sional self-concept—a perspective of who they are that would provide meaning and, thus, motivation to their daily lives. Their unique warfighting expertise, the ethics under which they employ it, the Nation's expectations for them, and service hardships inform military professionals of their calling's nobility.

Walking the Talk

Two of the ATLDP's more disturbing conclusions are that "the Army's Service Ethic and concepts of Officership are neither well-understood nor clearly defined [and] that Army Culture is not 'healthy' due to the existence of 'a gap between beliefs and practices' that 'is outside the band of tolerance.'"[11] Such findings are disturbing when one recalls the Army's superb professionalism during the Persian Gulf war. On the other hand, such findings show what is well known but seldom acknowledged because of the profession's often dysfunctional "can do" attitude; that is, living the life of an officer day after day, deployment after deployment, is a daunting task. Living such a life has become even more daunting during the past decade in which the Army profession has been overcommitted and under-resourced.

One of the quickest and most effective ways to restore trust within the Army officer corps and to address the gap in beliefs and practices is for officers to better "walk the talk" in every position of responsibility and authority in which they serve. Changing how Army officers see themselves and how each is motivated to perform will improve the climate and practices within every unit in every command in every region of the world where U.S. Armed Forces are deployed.

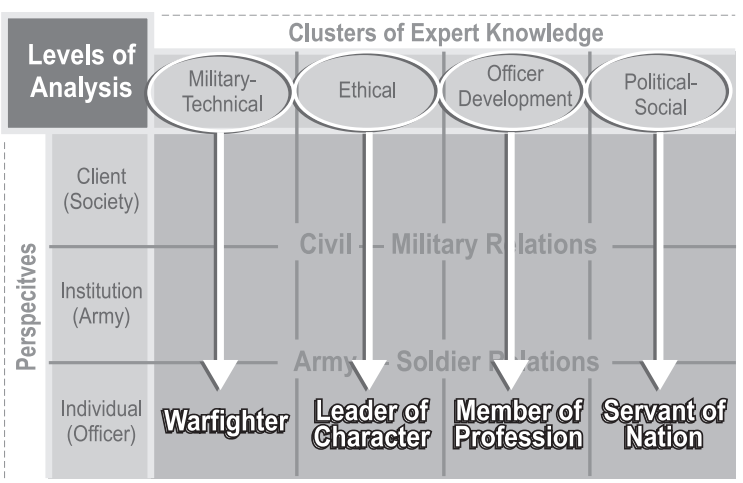

Figure 2. Analytical framework showing that each area of expert knowledge corresponds logically to one identity.

This is not to say that if all officers change their self-concept and motivation, all will be well within the Army. But self-concept is a source of individual motivation. Attitude and motivation influence behavior, and they can be used to great effect if they are placed in the correct professional context. If each officer better walks the talk to reflect congruence between Army beliefs and an officer's personal practice, the problems noted within the profession's training and leader development systems would be quickly and forthrightly leveraged toward ultimate resolution. To do so, officers must live principled lives both on and off duty. Doing so reflects a consistent set of time-tested principles that have proven best able to inform decisions of discretion and judgment. When deeply internalized from the contents of the Army's professional ethic (Army's values, warrior ethos, Ranger creed, commissioning oath, the Declaration of Independence, the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, and so on), such principles provide consistent, professional, and virtuous individual and collective behavior in officers' daily lives. The officer corps' time-tested principles include the following.[12]

Duty. Professional officers always do their duty, subordinating their personal interests to the requirements of the professional function. They are prepared, if necessary, to lay down their own lives and the lives of their soldiers in the Nation's interest. When assigned a mission or task, its successful execution is first priority, above all else, with officers accepting full responsibility for their actions and orders in accomplishing it—and accomplishing it in the right way. The officer's duty is not confined, however, to explicit orders or tasks; it extends to any circumstance involving allegiance to the commissioning oath.

Honor. An officer's honor, derived through history from demonstrated courage in combat is of paramount importance. Honor includes the virtues of integrity and honesty. Integrity is the personal honor of the individual officer, manifested in all roles. In peace, the officer's honor is reflected in consistent acts of moral courage. An officer's word is an officer's bond.

Loyalty. Military officers serve in a public vocation and their loyalty extends upward through the chain of command to the President as

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Commander in Chief and downward to all subordinates. Officers take care of their soldiers and their families. This loyalty is a central ingredient of the trust that binds the military profession to its public servant role.

Service. An officer's motivations are noble and intrinsic: a love for the technical and human aspects of providing the Nation's security and an awareness of the moral obligation to use that expertise for the benefit of society. The officer has no legacy except for the quality of his or her years of service.

Competence. The serious obligations of officership—and the enormous consequences of professional failure—establish professional competence as a moral imperative. More than knowing one's job or proficiency in the skills and abilities of the military art, professional competence in this sense includes worldly wisdom, creativity, and confidence. Called to their profession and motivated to master their practice of it, officers are committed to a career of study and learning.

Teamwork. Officers model civility and respect for others. They understand that soldiers of a democracy value an individual's worth and abilities, both at home and abroad. But because of the moral obligation accepted and the mortal means employed to carry out an officer's duty, the officer also emphasizes the importance of the group as against the individual. Success in war requires the subordination of the will of the individual to the task of the group. The military ethic is cooperative and cohesive in spirit, meritocratic, and fundamentally anti-individualistic and anti-careerist.

Subordination. Officers strictly observe the principle that the military is subject to civilian authority and do not involve themselves or their subordinates in domestic politics or policy beyond the exercise of the basic rights of citizenship. Military officers render candid and forthright professional judgments and advice and eschew the public advocate's role.

Leadership. Officers lead by example, always maintaining the personal attributes of spiritual, physical, and intellectual fitness requisite to the demands of their chosen profession and that serve as examples to be emulated.

Developmental Goals

Developmental goals of all commissioned officers should be to better understand the four identities of the Army officer and how they most appropriately are integrated into individual professional practice—a life lived daily in a principled manner. Understanding that they are simultaneously warfighters, leaders of character, members of a profession, and servants of the Nation can provide a powerful self-concept with which to confront challenges with inspiration and motivation. A common, shared self-concept can greatly help officers fulfill the extensive, unremitting responsibilities of leading the Army profession. ***MR***

NOTES

1. Gayle L. Watkins and Randi C. Cohen, "In Their Own Words: Army Officers Discuss Their Profession," in Don M. Snider, Gayle L. Watkins, and Lloyd J. Matthews, eds. *The Future of the Army Profession* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 77-100.
2. *See* The Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) Officer Study online at <www.army.mil/features/ATLD/ATLD.htm>, accessed on March 2002. *See also,* Joseph J. Collins and T.O. Jacobs, "Trust in the Army Profession," in Snider, Watkins, and Matthews, 39-58.
3. The competitive nature of modern professions is described in Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).
4. For more on the Army's competitors, *see* Deborah Avant, "Privatizing Military Training: A Challenge to U.S. Army Professionalism," in Snider, Watkins, and Matthews, 179-96; "America's Secret Armies," *US News and World Report* (4 November 2002): 38-43.
5. Extensive support for this statement is contained in "Project Conclusions," in Snider, Watkins, and Matthews.
6. For a detailed discussion of professional practice, *see* Abbott, chap. 25.
7. James Toner, *The Burden of Military Ethics* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 22-24.
8. For a comparison between earlier theorists of military professions, such as Samuel P. Huntington, and the newer school of competitive, turf-war professions, *see* James Burk, "Expertise, Jurisdiction, and Legitimacy in Military Professions," in Snider, Watkins, and Matthews, 19-38.
9. Gregg F. Martin and Jeffery D. McCausland, "The Role of Strategic Leaders for the Future Army Profession," in Snider, Watkins, and Matthews, 425-38.
10. This vexing problem is analyzed in considerable detail in Don M. Snider, John A. Nagl, and Tony Pfaff, *Army Professionalism, The Military Ethic, and Officership in the 21st Century* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, 1999).
11. ATLDP Officer Study, Executive Summary, OS-8.
12. These principles were first published in this form in *USMA Strategic Vision, 2010* (West Point, NY: Office of the Superintendent, 1999), 8. Some might wonder why we suggest a set of principles for commissioned officers to live by when the Army already has a set of values. The answer is straightforward: they are different constructs created for different developmental purposes for professional cohorts with different responsibilities. Of course Army officers must value the institution's values as must all soldiers, but because of the moral responsibilities of their commissions, their daily "walk" must also reflect principles not now addressed in the current version of Army values, for example, in the principles of subordination and the moral imperative of professional competence, and so on.

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